SPORN-O-GRAPHIC

An animation newsletter from Michael Sporn Animation Inc.

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EDITORIAL

Since the last issue of SPORN-O-GRAPHICS, a lot has happened in the animation world. **BEAUTY & THE BEAST** has received an Oscar nomination as Best Picture and has won the Golden Globe as Best Musical/Comedy Film. At the same time, the EMMY's have decided to ignore James Brooks' pleas. **THE SIMPSONS** are ineligible to compete with the live-action programs; hence their writers can't compete against other programs. The only category their show can enter is Best Animated Program. Even the actors cannot compete against other actors; instead there will be a special award for outstanding voice-overs.

A dozen other big-budget features are about to complete. Paramount, alone, is releasing two films this summer; Bakshi's **COOL WORLD** and the Huddlin Brother's **BEBE'S KIDS** attempt to reach a slightly older age group. **ROCKADOODLE** finally has a distributor and will be released to theatres in April and be available to home video in the fall. However, **ROVER DANGERFIELD** skipped the theatrical route and went straight to home video.

Last year, we heard about the lack of animators: the overabounding number of animation jobs available. It was the new golden age of animation. Then, with the recession, jobs were scarce (at least in New York). Animation which was supposed to start in this country went to corporate deals in France or Taiwan. **THE SIMPSONS** put the Koreans on the map, but Klasky-Csupo lost the account. (Will Phil Mendez send the work to Russia as his studio has done in the past?)

Animation in the 90's has finally caught up to the

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Correction: The October 1991 issue of Sporn-O-Graphics featured interviews with animator Tissa David and Editor Greg Perler by Esther McGowan. It was recently brought to my attention that Julie Allen, former Director of Public Relations, was the actual interviewer. I'd like to take this opportunity to apologize to Ms. Allen and thank her for her contribution to our first issue.

Denise Gonzalez, *Editor*

Editor-in-chief.....Denise Gonzalez
Design/Production .....Russ Adams

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Technique Versus Technology

John Canemaker comments on the possibilities and pitfalls of computer animation

Interview by Sue Perrotto

As a high-school kid "back in the Jurassic Period," as he puts it, John Canemaker got his start by watching animators like Walter Lantz demonstrate animation techniques on the old Woody Woodpecker and Disneyland TV shows. Since then, he has become a well-known animator, whose animation has appeared in "What Do Children Think of When They Think of the Bomb?," "The World According to Garp," and the Oscar-winning film "You Don't Have to Die." In addition, he is a noted animation historian. However, in this interview, John shares his views not only on animation's past, but its present and its exciting future.

S.P. How would you compare commercially-oriented animated films of the past with those of the present?

J.C. In many ways it hasn't changed. Disney is still doing what Disney does best. It's worth it, obviously, "Beauty and the Beast" is again really the fairy tale reprint of "Snow White." But it's nice. It's Disney, and we wouldn't really expect anything different from there. For the kids that are involved now in "Beauty and the Beast" and current Disney products, this will be their "Pinocchio." This will be their emotional court... their nostalgic feeling in years to come. I have kids in History of Animation who are nostalgic for

"The Flintstones." Such stuff I am not attached to. I am more fond of the older films. "Snow White..." "Fantasia..." and "Dumbo..." I don't think they could ever be topped in terms of technique. It was the height of the frame-by-frame cel technique. Now, with new techniques and innovations, the future can be quite exciting and quite different. It's starting to go that way, the adaptational, classical animation techniques with the new computer technology.

S.P. So, where do you think computer technology is going to take animation?

J.C. It's going to be incredible. I think that we will actually be in the main films. That's what virtual reality consists of... to put you into the action. The big thing now is interactive laserdiscs. It's just starting. I just worked on a pilot for Hanna-Barbera characters using the director principles. You can change the color of the entire picture. You can change the language. It could be done in French, German or whatever. This is just the beginning. In fact, the audience of the future will be interacting. In the future we may even be in "Fantasia." We might be flying through the air with the Pegasus family. We might be floating down the rivers of lava in "Rite of Spring." And now, we're talking also of taking the images of Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley, and starring them in "Casablanca." Just by putting together what makes Marilyn Marilyn, and what makes Humphrey Bogart Humphrey Bogart, you can cast them in these new things.

S.P. You were just talking about being in "Fantasia," but you also spoke about Disney always doing what Disney does best. It seems to me that they wouldn't go for that. Wouldn't they just keep on following their blueprint?

J.C. Well, they go for where the money, where the interest is. They've already started to adapt computer technology to the features. They're not using cels anymore. They're using printed-out backgrounds that they've done on computer grids they are very tedious and difficult to do conventionally, so, they've started, in their own way, to do it. It doesn't mean that they have to radically change their format, but if it becomes extremely popular for you to appear in something like "Beauty and the Beast," I'm sure that they'll dive right into it. It's just that the content is pretty much the same as it was back then.

S.P. You weren't always involved in computer animation. Now you're directing students toward it. Have you always been interested in computer animation, or did you switch over to it?

J.C. Well, here at school (NYU) we have the new computer room. It's something that is in addition to our traditional program of teaching here. We are basically committed to helping people find a way to put their visions on the screen, whether that's video or film. And whether that's the new technology of the old technology there are still traditions and forms that people should know about... How to stage an action... How to use the basic principles of character animation... Stretch and squash...

S.P. So, the traditional principles are absolutely important.

J.C. Oh, sure! How to tell a story. It's always going to be important to know how to do that. How to amuse an audience. How to communicate, basically. I've done some work with computers and with videotape technology including the recent AIDS Dance-a-thon commercial and the interactive laserdisc thing that I'm doing with Hanna-Barbera, and I'm finding that I have to work with people

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INTERVIEW

Animation Then and Now: An Interview with Dante Barbetta

Interview by Denise Gonzalez

Dante Barbetta is an animator who has worked on several MSA, Inc. films including **JAZZTIME TALE** *and* **IRA SLEEPS OVER**. *He got his first break in animation at Famous Studios in 1953. While at Famous he worked as an inker and inbetweener and his interest in animation grew. He animated many cartoon classics including Popeye and Casper. Over the years, he has worked as a freelance animator and spent fifteen years at the New York Institute of Technology. In that time he did a lot of experimental work with computer animation. I recently had the opportunity to ask him a few questions on the changes in the industry over the years as well as his views on computer animation.*

D.G. You worked in animation during the last days of Paramount. Things were very creative then and a lot of new styles were being tried. Has animation come full circle now, trying to remake the Disney classics of the forties?

D.B. My feeling is that animation has come back to full animation. There was a long period when UPA sent shock waves through the industry. Full or conventional animation was frowned upon. The emphasis was placed on design and styling with limited animation. Now the Disney-type animation is back in style and computer animation is opening up a lot of exciting new areas.

D.G. What do you think of today's cartoons? Do you think the quality has decreased at all over the years?

D.B. I'm very impressed with today's animation. When UPA was on the scene there wasn't much work except in commercials. Warner Brothers and Terry Toons closed. Three shorts a year was the average. Once in a while some house would get a special and this is where the damage came in. Animators would flood in to do the work and the quality would go out the door. When you saw it, it just wasn't something to be proud of. Today's quality is excellent. There is a lot of work for animators right now.

D.G. Are computers having a great effect on the industry?

D.B. They are but not as much as they will in the future. The problem is right now, computer animation is in the baby stage. Animators have only scratched the surface yet they are jumping the gun. It's like the early days, when a client sees something new they are impressed and want more. So we get bombarded. It's not ready, characters are overanimated. It all looks like polished metal or plastic. The automatic lighting and shading makes the characters cold looking. There needs to be a marriage between two dimensional and three dimensional animation. The marriage will give computer animation the warmth and charm of conventional animation. I think this will allow animators to come up with ideas that will stimulate character and story.

D.G. Do you think computers will eventually take over?

D.B. Computers will probably squeeze out the little people. The equipment is costly and the smaller studios may not have the money to do it. The larger houses will have the advantage of experimentation. But I hope they will see that the marriage between computer and conventional animation will open doors never dreamed of.

D.G. What has changed most about this business over the years?

D.B. There aren't any training grounds. Years ago you could go into a studio and be trained. Today, except for Disney, a person can only get training in school or from books. But the best experience is working at an actual studio. Animation is funny. It can't be taught. You have to be in it. You need to work in a studio under a good animator who can teach you. Another difference is the speed at which work is turned out. Today there is a lot of terrific stuff turned out in a short period of time.

D.G. Going back to the title of the piece, is there anything about animation then and now that we should know?

D.B. As exciting as some features and TV programs are, one thing is disturbing. Animation has become so sophisticated that it has lost the simplicity and charm of earlier features. This disturbs me. It goes back to UPA when full animation was frowned upon and the emphasis was on stylized animation. Today simplicity is frowned upon. The artist naturally wants to develop and grow but the dangerous thing is that they force their opinions on the audience, saying old is outdated. No matter how old the audience, they are still a child at heart. You can't destroy that. Sophistication falls flat. The audience isn't drawn into it. Instead they are overwhelmed by the visuals. The animator must take into consideration what the audience wants. Today's animation is superb but animators shouldn't put too much emphasis on "perfect animation." When that happens, it loses something very important. ■

Behind the Camera

by Stephen Gambello

There are many types of animation companies, all of which have one thing in common, the camera. Some companies have the facility of an in-house camera, while others utilize an outside service. Michael Sporn Animation, Inc. is one such company and F-Stop Studio is the camera service it has been associated with for the last eleven years.

Gary Becker, the head of F-Stop studio, started his career fourteen years ago working as an apprentice for the now defunct Animation Camera Workshop run by Jonas Mauber. After a year he became a full-fledged cameraman working on commercials and features. In 1979, he went to California to work as a cameraman for Hanna-Barbera and Ralph Bakshi.

He then returned to New York in 1980 to start his own company, which took the name of F-Stop Studio in 1983.

Gary Becker has employed a number of people throughout the years but considers his present staff to be his best. Gary has forty years experience on his staff in the person of his associate Bob Bushell. Bob has given Gary invaluable advice as well as an in-depth knowledge of the craft of animation cinematography. For Gary Becker, communication between client and cameraman is essential. "There are many decisions the cameraman must make on the spot because of time restrictions. Being familiar with a client's style eases the decision making." The cameraman's duties includes framing every scene and planning out each optical effect, whether it be dissolves, pans, truck-ins or truck-outs.

Gary Becker and his staff have worked on many projects with incredible speed. They can shoot a half-hour animation spot in as little as 20 days. What aids in this speed is the use of two Oxberry

COMING ATTRACTIONS

VIDEO UPDATE

Western Publishing will release Sporn's MilKE MULLIGAN AND HIS STEAM SHOVEL in April. Family Home Entertainment plans to re-release four Michael Sporn favorites in June. They include:

THE MARZIPAN PIG
THE RED SHOES
THE DANCING FROG
THE LITTLE MATCH GIRL

For a limited time these titles will be available to the public for a special low price. Two **new** titles have also been scheduled for June release,

NONSENSE & LULLABYES: POEMS
NONSENSE & LULLABYES: NURSERY

On HBO:

March
*THE RED SHOES**
THE RISE AND FALL OF HUMPTY DUMPTY

April
*A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES**
*EARTHDAY BIRTHDAY**

May
THE RUNAWAY TEA POT
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU

* *Michael Sporn films*

FEATURES

With the recent success of **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST** and **THE LITTLE MERMAID**, movie theatres are experiencing an influx of animated features. 1992 will bring us:

Film	Animator	Studio	Release Date
ROCK-A-DOODLE	Don Bluth	Samuel Goldwyn	April 3
FERNGULLY: THE LAST RAIN FOREST	Bill Kroyer	20th Century Fox	April 10
BEBE'S KIDS	Hudlin Bros.	Paramount	Summer
COOL WORLD	Ralph Bakshi	Paramount	Summer
WE'RE BACK	Spielberg	Universal	Fall
ALADDIN	—	Disney	Fall

cameras. "The computer controls the motors and the actual movement (if any) of the camera itself, repeating the same movement exactly. This also aids in mapping out for optical effects. " The Oxberry camera is the standard model used for animation cinematography. It was developed by John Oxberry while in the Signal Corps. after World War II. The camera uses a basic Mitchell body and magazine. The shutter and pin registration were designed by Oxberry. "The Oxberry's pin registration gives the camera a rock-steady image."

Other areas of cinematography F-Stop is involved in are photo-animation, film graphics and credits for live-action films. F-Stop also provides another unique service. "My associate Bob Bushell, has developed a system of photoprojection whereby live action and animation can be combined, so rotoscoping is now not necessary." Traditionally when live-action and animation were combined, rotoscoping was employed. This process had each frame of live-action film projected onto a cel. The animator uses this as a guide for combining the artwork within the frame. Bob Bushell's method develops each frame of film onto a perfectly registered pre-punched photograph. With this method, projecting is not needed and the animator has an actual photograph as a guide.

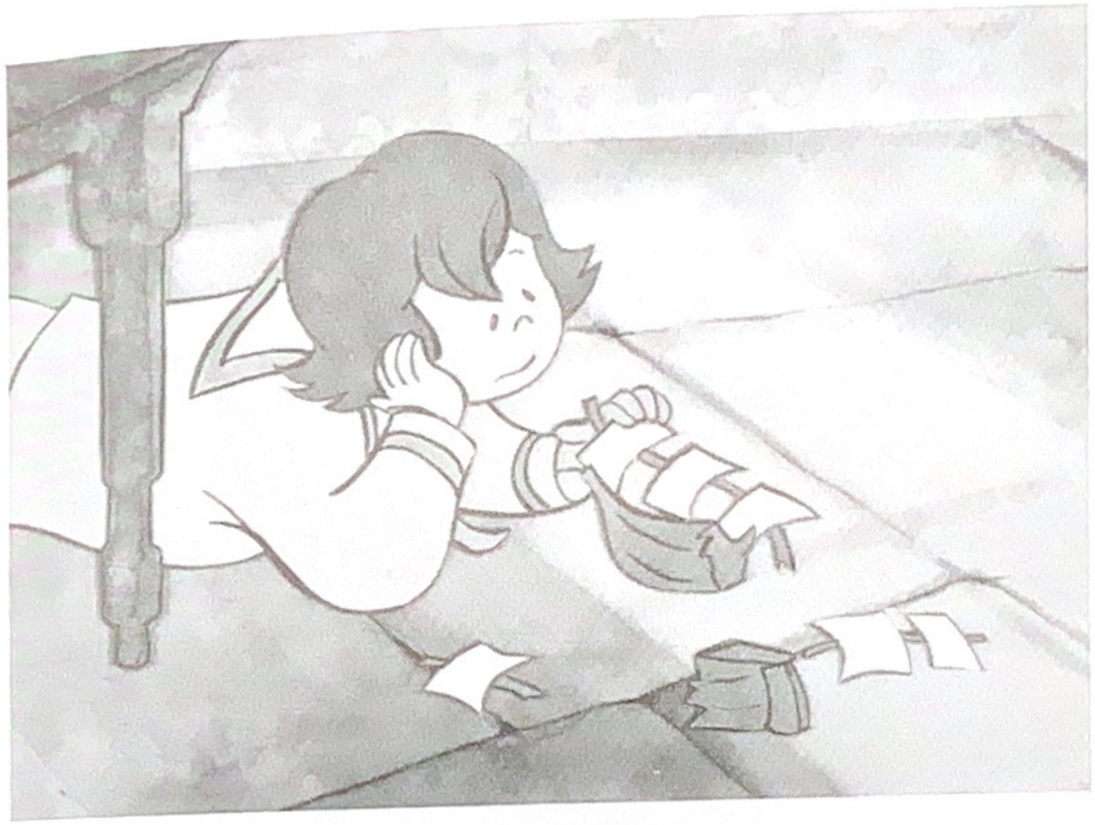
Gary looks forward to newer techniques such as digital and video technologies. "We're waiting to see which technologies will become firmly established; then we will concentrate on which techniques to branch out into." For him, the sky's the limit to performing on film what the client needs. "The cameraman is like a musician. The musician has a sheet in front of him with just notes on it. This changes when the musician interprets the work. The same thing occurs with the cameraman. His style and nuances interpret on film what the animator has drawn. He is responsible for the final appearance of the artwork on film." ■

Storyboard from *Child's Garden of Verses*

Nineteen-ninety-one was an active year for MSA, Inc., with the production of five half-hour films as well as a sixth, **A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES**, which wrapped in mid-February. Miss Saigon's Jonathan Pryce narrates this very special film that combines Robert Louis Stevenson's classic verse with original music by Broadway composer Charles Strouse (Annie, Bye Bye Birdie.)

The screenplay by Thomas Meehan tells the story of a young boy, who at the peak of childhood, is stricken with a life-threatening illness that forces him to stay inside away from his playmates and the exciting world of the outdoors. However, in his solitude, he is able to find comfort. His mother tells him that he has an "inner spirit," a special gift that allows his imagination to do all the things he cannot do in reality. It is this "inner spirit" that carries him through his illness and allows him to become an ordinary child once again. This gift remains into his adulthood and becomes the tool he uses to write many stories and books that will make him famous.

A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES is scheduled to air as one of HBO's Storybook Musicals April 3, with repeat broadcasts on the 5th, 8th, 19th, 21st and 27th of April.



Currently in production is a half-hour adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's **THE EMPEROR'S NIGHTINGALE.** The screenplay by Maxine Fisher tells the story of a lonely Japanese emperor who finds a true friend in the form of a nightingale that sings in the gardens that surround his palace.

THE NIGHTINGALE will star Mako as the emperor and feature original music by composer Caleb Sampson. It is scheduled to air next season on the PBS series *Long Ago and Far Away.** ■

**Updates in our next issue.*

CANEMAKER, *continued from page 4*

and to direct in a pretty traditional way. My job as the director and the animator is to make those decisions. But here at school we offer it and also emphasize that it's important to go through the basic story visualization and how to put your vision on-screen so that it communicates what you want it to communicate. It's still dealing with the basic principles.

S.P. What principles would you consider important?

J.C. I think it's important that animators experience everything. Grim Natwick said he was an athlete. He was a track star in high school, and he said he had a physical feel for animation because he knew, himself, what the body was going through when he went through those things. I feel that I sometimes do designs that move in pleasant character animation per se, but I do have a feel for how a character should work emotionally… the timing of an action or reaction… and I recall that from having performed. I've been telling the kids that besides doing life-drawing, that they should actually become actors themselves. You know, as an animator, you've got your brain and you've got your hand, but there are other elements. Have you tried singing? Have you tried moving as a dancer? Have you tried talking to someone in pantomime? You need this body of knowledge that only living and experience can give you. I think that kind of knowledge adds to you as a person and as an animator.

S.P. So, if an animator doesn't have life-experience as well as the skills you mentioned, would you say that it creates a trap that might get him/her too involved in the technical wizardry of computers and ignore the basics of filmmaking and traditional animation?

J.C. Sure! We've all seen computer animations go on and on and on. They could use some ideas about the use of dynamic editing, for example, or direction, or staging, or psychological use of color. All of these things are basic points of knowledge that any well-rounded film of video person should continue to know. Computers are another tool, and are leading us into another new world of wonderful pictures… interesting pictures. ■

Sue Perrotto is a graduate of NYU's Film Animation division and has taught there, as well as working for MSA, Inc. and other studios.

EDITORIAL, continued from inside cover

rest of the world. The artistry has been lost to the big business. Former animators now do storyboards. Directors do their work by meticulously timing storyboards and coordinating overseas projects. They never talk to their actors, the animators. Computers eliminated the use of cels on **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST**, but you can still buy set-ups from that film! Ted Turner has bought Hanna-Barbera and will use their library to start an all animation network on cable. (Yogi and Huck 24 hours a day — all of it done in the past.)

Where is this all heading? If we were to judge from the past, we would expect it all to take a big nose dive. The success of **FRITZ THE CAT** (the first adult animated feature) brought a dozen imitations that all failed miserably. (How many of us can remember **THE NINE LIVES OF FRITZ THE CAT**?) But things are different now. The video tape market can take a theatrical failure and turn it into a financial success.

The fun, at the moment, seems to be in the waiting. At any rate, it makes for an interesting period in animation's future; something for the future historians to contemplate and analyze. For the time being, I'll enjoy the work. ■

ANIMATICS

by Michael Sporn

In 1973 I worked at the Hubley Studio. John and Faith Hubley were producing "Voyage to Next", a 10-minute short about world peace. The final film would win the grand prize at the Cannes film festival and be nominated for the Oscar.

At one point in the production, which was partially funded by the Institute for World Order, finances ran out. The film was about two-thirds shot and the track was near completion. The Hubleys decided it would be best to complete the last third by producing an animatic. This would show prospective backers what the final film would look like. We took rough animation (missing inbetweens) and colored it. Backgrounds were completed and shot. Pencil test was included.

I can remember seeing the dailies of this material alone with John. The animatic had, for the first time, been synched to the pre-mixed track. After his first viewing, John turned to me and commented that this was so handsome in its own right. He thought it would be great someday to train audiences to watch pencil tests and animatics. It would give them the same treat we were having.

Years later, I found myself watching a New York Film Festival audience watching a rough cut of **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST**. Here was a print of the film complete with storyboard drawings, rough animation pencil tests, and some final film. The response was a standing ovation which led to an Academy Award nomination for the film as Best Picture.

After years of watching Rabbit Ears' animatics (such as **THE VELVETEEN RABBIT** and **ANANSI, THE SPIDER**), audiences seem to be ready to watch this "new" form of entertainment. I wish John Hubley were still here to see the reaction, and I wonder how he would use it in his films. ■

The Great Cel-Out

Do you like the stories you've seen from Michael Sporn studios? Now is your chance to own a piece of the action!

Just write down the name of the film you like and the name of the character(s) and scene you want below. Make out a check or money order for $33.00 per cel, and send it with this page to the following address:

Michael Sporn Animation, Inc.
632 Broadway
New York, NY 10012
attn: Cel-Out

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Film: _____

Character/Scene: _____

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Film: _____

Character/Scene: _____

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Character/Scene: _____

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